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AUTHOR Uzzolino, Carol
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ABSTRACT

To study the effect of nursery school attendance on reading readiness at the kindergarten level, a questionnaire was sent to the parents of 40 kindergarten students in order to determine which children had attended a nursery school program, when, and for how long. Scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills were then recorded for all respondents. The national percentile score for total language was used to determine if those students who attended a nursery school scored higher in this test of readiness than those who did not. Results indicated that there was no significant difference in the readiness performance of children in kindergarten who attended nursery school and those who did not. (HOD)

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Does Attendance in a Nursery School Program Have an Effect on Reading Readiness at the Kindergarten Level?

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of
a Master of Arts Degree in Reading Specialization at
Kean College of New Jersey

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ABSTRACT

Children who attended nursery school were studied to determine if this attendance had an effect on reading readiness at the kindergarten level. Attendance was determined through the use of questionnaires. Scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills were compared for students who attended nursery school and for those who did not attend. It was determined that there was no significant difference in the reading readiness scores between these groups of children.

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A greater number of children in today's society attend a nursery school program. Does it have an effect on their performance in a reading readiness program when these children enter kindergarten? Children who attended the California State Preschool Program scored higher on achievement tests in reading readiness than those who attended the Children's Center Preschool or the control group who did not attend any preschool program. (Osterlind, 1980-81) Testing was done at the beginning and end of the kindergarten program.

If there is an effect on reading readiness by attendance in nursery school, a recommendation that all students attend nursery school would have vast implications for the educational establishment. The New York Department of Education did a study in this area. Children who attended the Experimental Pre-Kindergarten Program in New York were found to have an academic advantage at least through the third grade, better general reasoning ability and greater knowledge of verbal concepts through second grade. (Smith, 1982)

Children enter Kindergarten with a wide variety of differences in print awareness. (Hiebert, 1980) Fifty-six percent of these differences can be accounted for by the child's logical reasoning ability, oral comprehension and home experiences.

The preferred value orientation of nursery schools is individuality and socialization as opposed to cognitive training for children. (Hieldebrand, 1975) At the kindergarten level, parents still ranked social development as the number one priority for the program. Intellectual development and development of self-concept were rated higher by teachers. (Goulet, 1975)

Gates' research found that success of a beginning reading program was determined by quality of instruction rather than the timing of instruction. If well taught, reading instruction can have a positive effect on kindergarten children. (Durkin, 1981)

Russian children enter the kindergarten program at the age of three. It is a four year program during which there is no formal teaching of reading readiness skills. Many opportunities are provided, however, to internalize symbolic representations. This is done through the child's own thinking rather than direct teaching. Verbal rules are never taught. The philosophy is to accentuate the positive in order to ensure a good self image. These methods have been proven desirable by Russian research. Most of that research agrees with American research, but the implementation is different. (Ungaro, 1974)

Nursery schools play an important role in American education. The benefits available from these programs must be developed to their maximum potential.

HYPOTHESIS

Children who do not attend a nursery school prior to kindergarten are often in the minority. When these children are compared with children who attended a nursery program prior to kindergarten, there will be a significant difference in reading readiness achievement at the kindergarten level. The children will enter the program with a better knowledge of language development and verbal concepts if they have been exposed to a preschool experience.

DEFINITIONS

Nursery school - a prekindergarten school for three and four year old children

Reading Readiness - the child's ability to meet the requirements of learning to read as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

It is assumed that the parents will respond to the questionnaire accurately and that the test scores will be valid.

One of the limitations of the study is that children who did not attend nursery school may have received a strong background of knowledge in the home. The number of children in the sample is another limitation. The objectives of each nursery school program and each kindergarten program are different, providing another limitation to this study.

PROCEDURES

A questionnaire was used in order to determine which children attended a nursery school program, when, and for how long. The sample was taken from an elementary school in Belleville, New Jersey. Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire, the principal of the school was contacted in person and his approval was received. The two teachers whose students were used in the research also agreed to cooperate. The questionnaires were delivered to the teachers, who distributed them to forty students, thirty-four questionnaires were returned to the researcher. Seven of the questionnaires were unable to be used in the

data because the students' test scores were not available. Approximately half of the respondents attended a nursery school program. The parents of these children felt that it was a worthwhile experience from which their children greatly benefited. Scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills were recorded for all respondents. The national percentile score for total language was used to determine if those students who attended nursery school scored higher in this test of readiness than those who did not attend nursery school.

RESULTS

Table I

Mean, S.D. and t on the Samples Using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Form 7, Level 5

Variable	Mean	S.D.	t
Attended Nursery School N = 14	54.86	28.51	0.65
Did Not Attend Nursery School N = 13	46.92	32.64	

As can be seen in Table I, the percentile score for total language ability on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills was compared for the two groups. The t of 0.65 indicated that there was no significant difference in the readiness performance of children in kindergarten who attended nursery school when compared with those who did not attend. The mean for those who attended nursery school was slightly higher than those who did not attend, but the difference between the means was not significant. The majority of those who attended nursery school did so

five days per week for one year at the age of four. Although test scores did not indicate superior performance in the area of reading readiness, all of the parents whose children attended a nursery school program felt it was a beneficial experience for their children.

CONCLUSIONS

When comparing the number of students in each group of the sample, it was unexpected to find the number of students in each was approximately the same. With the changes in today's society, it was expected that many more students would be in the group that attended nursery school when compared to those who did not attend. Of those who attended a nursery school program most attended local programs for approximately one year. The parents of these children felt that it was a worthwhile experience. Test scores for the two groups indicated that there was no significant difference in reading readiness between those who attended nursery school and those who did not attend. It was also found that many other factors influenced student's scores. Many of the students in the sample were bilingual and attending classes in English as a Second Language. Other students were noted to have hearing problems, be communication handicapped and have family problems.

The hypothesis that attendance in a nursery school program would have a significant effect on reading readiness at the kindergarten level was rejected.

Nursery School Attendance and Readiness: Related Literature

Nursery schools are developing increasing importance in today's society. Children are attending these programs in increasing numbers. The effects of this trend have important implications for education. When children enter into school at the kindergarten level, they are often given instruction in reading readiness skills. If the child attended a nursery school program, it will have an effect on reading readiness.

Osterlind (1980-81) studied this impact on children and its effect in kindergarten. He compared children in kindergarten in terms of those who participated in a nursery school program and those who did not attend nursery school. Children from the California State Preschool and the Children's Center Preschool were used in the study along with a third group of children who did not attend any type of preschool program. All of the children entered the same public school kindergarten program at the age of five and received no difference in treatment.

Several factors were considered in this research: 1) reading (or reading readiness) and mathematics achievements, 2) academic potential, 3) social and emotional maturity, 4) conforming to successful pupil behaviors, and 5) academic and social adjustment within the classroom setting. The following testing instruments were used to measure these factors: 1) Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), 2) Analysis of Readiness Skills (ARS), 3) Academic Potential Index, 4) Social and Emotional Index, 5) Pupil Behavior Index (PBI), 6) Ypsilanti Rating Scale (YRS), 7) Home Environment Scale, and 8) Interviews.

One finding of the study was the significant relationship

between preschool and reading readiness. The scores for children who attended the California State Preschool Program were higher at the beginning of kindergarten and remained so throughout kindergarten. The opposite results were noted for mathematics achievement. No difference in academic potential was found for the Children's Center group and the group who had no preschool experience. The children who attended preschool did show greater social and emotional maturity, but no significant difference was found between the three groups related to adjustment to academic and social settings in the classroom.

The New York State Education Department conducted a study to find out if children who attend a preschool program made better progress in the primary grades. The preschool program was designed for children from a low economic status with special needs who may not be able to receive the maximum benefit from school. The goals of the program include enhancing thinking, developing a good self-concept, developing problem-solving capabilities and stimulating imagination. Performance was measured in the areas of general reasoning, school-related knowledge of skills, knowledge of verbal concepts, task orientation, extraversion and verbal facility. The results of various tests along with studying the progress of children throughout the grades were used to measure progress in these areas.

The study showed that the effect at the end of preschool was very impressive, but diminished as each year progressed. Some evidence was found, however, that there are some lasting effects on the children who attended the Prekindergarten program. The academic advantage lasted at least through the third grade. Kindergarten children scored higher

on tests of general reasoning ability, if they participated in the program. This advantage remained through the second grade. The children who participated in the program also demonstrated a greater knowledge of verbal concepts.

"Wanting to read should come before learning to read." (Lowes, 1975) Based on this premise, Lowes notes the importance of reading to children. The material should be of good literary quality and of interest to the child so the child develops a desire to read. Time should be spent building a child's background of experience, in order to bring meaning to words when formal reading instruction begins. This instruction should not begin until the child is ready to learn. She suggests language experience charts and labeling objects around the room as a means of stimulating a child's interest in the printed word. Teachers must be on the lookout for children who are "hungry" to learn the mysteries of printed symbols.

Durkin (1978) examined the differences concerning when reading instruction should begin. Readiness was originally thought to occur at a certain stage of development, when a child reached the mental age of 6.5 years old. Other research showed that quality of instruction rather than mental age effect success in beginning reading. A good kindergarten program has a language arts orientation emphasizing concept development and enhances a child's listening and speaking vocabulary. Well prepared teachers along with smaller classes and the help of aides will improve kindergarten classrooms. Durkin also notes that "different children can be expected to have different kinds and amounts of abilities by the end of the year."

The difference among children in regard to print awareness was the focus of Hiebert's (1980) study. Three variables were used in the study: 1) logical reasoning ability, 2) oral language comprehension, and 3) home experiences. Sixty children were used in the study. Three, four and five year olds were divided into three groups of twenty children each. Logical reasoning ability was measured by performance on three tasks: dichotomous sorting, serial ordering and conservation of numbers. Oral language comprehension was measured by performance on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and an abbreviated form of the Miller-Yoder Test of Grammatical Comprehension. Home experience was determined through the use of a parent questionnaire on modeling and teaching. Conventional reading skills and concepts about print were the measures of print awareness.

The results of this study show that fifty-six percent of the difference in children's print awareness can be accounted for by logical reasoning ability, oral language comprehension and home experience. Logical reasoning was the variable found to be most closely associated to reading-related learning.

Most of the Russian research in this area agrees with the American research; however, the implementation is different, according to Ungaro (1974). When looking at Russian reading programs, one must go back to look at the preschool program. The stress of this program is to provide for basic reading concepts by giving the children a strong foundation of experiences. The concept of the word is what is most important, not the sound. The child must be able to internalize the word. No formal training in reading readiness skills is given in Russian preschools,

but vocabulary is developed through the use of games, puppets and dramatics. Verbal rules are not directly taught, but many experiences with symbolic representations are provided so that children can use their own thinking to internalize the concept. When these children enter the first grade and are ready to be exposed to words, they are well acquainted with the concepts found in the reading material due to pre-school experiences. The preschool program is a time when children develop positive feelings toward school and themselves. The study of Russian preschools provides an alternate way of applying the same concept to beginning reading and may help program American children for success in reading.

The value orientation for nursery school programs was studied by Hildebrand (1975). Questionnaires were distributed to pre-professional students, para-professional aides, professional nursery school teachers and parents of nursery school children in order to bring about an awareness of the value orientations held by these groups. The questionnaires consisted of nine one paragraph stories that each respondent rated for value. The respondent also determined the paragraph considered to be the most desirable. The nine categories that were measured are 1) Socialization, 2) Cognitive, 3) Morality, 4) Aesthetics, 5) Authority, 6) Health, 7) Freedom, 8) Individuality, and 9) Economics.

The results showed that Individuality and Socialization were given the highest rating. Individuality was rated most desirable by sixty-seven percent of the respondents and second by twenty-two percent. Socialization was marked most desirable by twenty-three percent and second by fifty percent. The decisions made in nursery schools are

consciously or unconsciously based on these value orientations.

Once the child reaches the kindergarten level, what are the curriculum priorities of teachers and parents? Goulet (1975) researched these priorities in kindergarten classrooms. Similar to preschool programs, he found kindergarten programs also contain a diversity of skills and areas of development. Kindergarten and first grade teachers and parents were asked to respond to a questionnaire rating the appropriateness of several areas for kindergarten. The eight areas included were 1) academic development, 2) emotional development, 3) language development, 4) other intellectual development, 5) physical development, 6) self-concept development, 7) sensory-perceptual development, and 8) social development.

The results of this study showed that parents' priorities were in the area of social development. Both groups of teachers rated other intellectual development, which includes following directions, memory skills and self-concept development, as the important priorities.

Research appears to indicate that preschool programs have a positive effect on children. Children are exposed to opportunities that will help build a background of experience. When these children begin formal reading instruction, they will be better prepared to deal with the concepts presented to them. Many children in today's society attend nursery school programs and enter school with these advantages. The effect of these advantages is important to education.

APPENDIX A

PERCENTILE SCORES - IOWA TEST OF BASIC SKILLS

Attended Nursery School N = 14

1.	81	8.	31
2.	9	9.	81
3.	44	10.	69
4.	69	11.	57
5.	26	12.	9
6.	81	13.	99
7.	31	14.	81

Did Not Attend Nursery School N = 13

1.	31	8.	17
2.	9	9.	2
3.	90	10.	69
4.	81	11.	17
5.	13	12.	69
6.	69	13.	44
7.	99		

APPENDIX B

December, 1982

Dear Parents:

A survey is being conducted to discover which children have had the benefit of attending a nursery school program. Please indicate the necessary information below and return it to school as soon as possible. Thank you.

1. Name of child: _____

2. Did your child attend a formalized nursery school program?

Yes No

3. If yes, at what age did he/she attend?

Age 3 Age 4

4. How many days a week did he/she attend? For how long?

_____ days per week

one year two years

5. What school did he/she attend?

School _____

Location _____

6. Do you feel that it was a worthwhile experience?

Yes No

Comments:

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